

# Developing Eden Media

## Notes from the Eden Media Conference on 29th June 2009

At the Eden Media / Social Media for Youth Participation conference on the 29th June a wide range of approaches to using social media in youth engagement were explored. This document tries to briefly capture the diverse eco-system of possible projects to promote young people's participation through using digital tools - and to suggest a number of ways forward for using social media in youth engagement across Cumbria.

This complements slides and notes from Practical Participation's input into the event available at: <http://www.practicalparticipation.co.uk/notes/eden>

### Approaches to engagement

Throughout the day we explored a range of different approaches to using social media for youth engagement including:

- **Using 'Walled Garden' Online Networks:** sites which are fully owned by a youth serving organisation and which are self-contained platforms for networking, sharing content and interaction.

With a walled garden site safety features desired by local authorities / agencies can be built into the *technology* - and agencies can gate-keep who has access to the network.

It can be easier to get access to 'Walled Garden' networks provided in schools and colleges.

In Cumbria the 'SpeakUpCumbria.co.uk' walled garden network is due to be launched in September by Connexions.

- **Using Free, White Label and Open Source Platforms:** including Wordpress.com, Ning.com and YouTube. With these low cost and free platforms an online engagement space can be quickly put together by connecting and linking up different tools.

Often these are tools young people are familiar with and already using. However, care must be taken to make sure that the *process* of using these sites is safe - and young people are encouraged to manage their own safety when posting and sharing content in public or semi-public online spaces.

Most free and open source tools offer advanced privacy settings, and these require careful attention to configure them in ways that promote online safety, whilst not undermining online opportunities.

- **Content Hubs & Online Outreach:** Young people shared the results of a survey in their school which suggested the best way to contact them to let them know about Positive Activities was likely to be via Facebook, followed closely by Text message, and with other 'interactive websites' featuring low on their list of good information channels.

Outreach to the social networks where young people are already active fits well with the

youth work principle of 'starting where young people are at' and the idea of taking content and engagement to the places where young people are already hanging out online.

Setting up a 'Content Hub' allows organisations to have a central web presence with outposts across different social networks and online spaces where young people are active. This is the approach the EdenMedia website has taken so far.

Organisations can directly join and engage in existing social networks - or can support young people to share media peer-to-peer through their own social networks.

- **Supporting Social Reporters:** Young people can be trained and supported to gather media by reporting on events, interviewing peers and adults and uploading the content to the web. This content provides a hub for online discussion and networking - and increases the supply of information about the local area.

The process of creating content gives young people an opportunity to express their opinions - and provides an opportunity to explore safe and effective ways to communicate online.

The content created by young social reporters can be fed into the decision making or authorities and agencies.

## Weaving the Web

The approaches above are far from mutually exclusive. Nor is this an exhaustive list.

During the afternoon workshop we explored a wide range of strategies for using social media tools for online engagement - and these strategies demonstrated how a wide variety of different tools and approaches can be combined to create effective online engagement with young people.

Tools	Benefits	Challenges	Making it Work
Content Hubs	- link to a forum - 3m + - already exists - Time saving	- hard to participate - monitoring - challenge	- research - capacity - building - create content
Social Reporters	- up actively involved - give voice - get engaged - feedback immediate - audience (growth)	- Training - Resources (time & equipment) - Security	- information - you can use - to evaluate or - create target audience
Listening Dashboards	- monitoring information - frequency of activity - see if this - providing negative - feedback	- Monitoring/Filtering - Volume? Monitoring - Range on sets - Getting big big picture - Getting - being active - getting feedback - (not a lot of time)	- Know how to - be targeted - + available to - everyone - everyone
Facebook	- Feedback - but always - by up there	- Security - often - limited time	- Security - often - limited time

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## Process matters

Regardless of the online tools used, or approach adopted - it is crucial to reflect on how a given strategy or set of activities contributes to meaningful participation by young people.

Is it a media projects? Or a participation project which can lead to real change for children and young people?







## Diverse approaches

There is no single right approach. It is right for authorities and agencies to support a wide range of different approaches. This should be strategic - and based on reaching a wide range of young people.

### Participants grid

It may be useful to draw up a participants grid, to check who is being included by different approaches, and to be sure that groups are not being excluded. The example grid below shows a range of areas and groups of young people to engage.

You can plot the different forms of engagement against the groups you expect they will reach - and this can be regularly reviewed. It may be appropriate to have more than one form of engagement open to each group.

> Demographic < V Locality V	In Education	Not in Education, Employment or Training	Young People in Care	Young People with Disabilities	...
Eden		Outreach worker		 Social Reporters Train & support young people to be digital reporters at	
Barrow			 Social Reporters Train & support young people to be digital reporters at	...	
Copeland	...	...	...	...	
...					

The icons above are given as an example only. The choice of approach to reach each target group will often need to be identified with the help of young people.

### Agile, experimental and evaluated

Even with prior consultation, exactly how a given platform for engagement will be used is hard to predict.

It is important for projects to be agile - focussed on finding the best process for engagement, and able to adapt and use different tools and platforms if this is necessary.

Setting targets, and providing a framework for ongoing evaluation can help generate useful learning from agile and experimental approaches to online engagement, and supports practitioners to constantly review and develop their online engagement work.

### Connecting the dots

Local services should be encouraged and supported to develop their own online engagement approaches. To help connect these up - it can be useful to develop a central hub where content from distributed engagement can be brought together - and to informally agree shared 'tags' (key words) which can be used to bring content together.

## **Making things happen**

There are many different ways to move forward the work started by Eden Media. Below are a number of suggested elements of a forward plan - along with indications of ways Practical Participation could support this work.

### **Participation Strategy**

It is key to tie online engagement explicitly in with the participation and youth engagement strategies of the local authority, Children's Trust and Partners. The Hear by Right framework for organisational change for active participation may be a useful tool here.

Visit <http://hbr.nya.org.uk> for information on Hear by Right. Practical Participation are keen to support innovative and new media approaches to exploring Hear by Right mapping and planning of existing participation.

### **Training for Adults**

A training day for workers in agencies to gain a deeper understanding of social media and its implications for their work could be provided. This should also include hands-on skills-building where young people are involved as co-trainers.

Practical Participation are working with London East Connections Partnership to develop a national programme of CPD for youth sector staff in the use of social media.

### **Social Reporter Training**

Agencies should identify capacity to provide training and support for young social reporters.

The lead agency for taking forward Eden Media work could develop and provide a toolkit and training-the-trainers package to support other organisations to engage young people as social reporters. This would provide a clearly defined way to involve an increasing number of agencies.

### **Common Tag**

The lead agencies should informally agree a set of shared tags to help weave together online content wherever it is posted.

### **Mailing List**

An e-mail discussion list for potential project partners should be established.

### **Dedicated Budget**

Lead agencies should explore whether a dedicated budget can be made available for supporting social media and youth engagement pilots. This may be distributed through youth-led grant-making (e.g. Youth Opportunity Fund)

### **Removing the barriers**

Local authorities and partner agencies should identify ways to remove barriers to online engagement.

Practical Participation are due to launch a 'Charter on Open Government' at the upcoming Reboot Britain conference on the 6th July. We would welcome involvement in this and the following project to remove barriers to online engagement from Eden Council and its partners.